

# Traditional Japanese Health Food—Natto

## 日本の伝統的健康食—納豆

### An Interview Regarding “MegumiNATTO™” Newly on Sale ~Part 2~

#### “MegumiNATTO™” 新発売インタビュー 第2回

(Continuing from the previous issue) At the same time as it has come on sale, “Megumi NATTO™” has become a topic of conversation as the first locally produced natto fermented soybeans using organic soybeans grown in the United States. We talked with President Minami Sato of Japan Traditional Foods (www.meguminatto.com), the manufacturer of the product, to hear about the strategy for the traditional Japanese food business in America.

#### “The Target is Americans Intent on Healthy Living”

**Japanese Restaurant News (hereafter JRN):** I have been eating *natto* since I was a child, and today I am still a big fan of *natto*, but since there is a cultural difference with Americans, it seems to me that there are many people who find it comparatively unappealing. Could you explain the reason behind the daring targeting of Americans and not Japanese people?

**Minami Sato (hereafter S):** There are also some Japanese people who dislike *natto*. In the light of that, perhaps there are also Americans who do like *natto*. But for *natto* to spread overseas in the future, the support of Americans is necessary and moreover, indispensable. There has come to be a wide variation in Americans' palates and awareness in regards to food, especially in the cities. Local food ingredients are highly valued, and there are probably even more Americans than Japanese grappling with their approach to food with an intent towards healthy living.

In the previous installment, we talked about how soybeans have a high evaluation in American society, but on the other hand, awareness of fermented food products is growing. Fermented food products have great preservative properties, and increased nutritional values over the original raw food materials. And then, as one knows with things

like soy sauce, *miso*, *mirin* sweet sake and *katuo-bushi* dried bonito shavings, the “*umami*,” deliciousness is also enhanced.

In the case of thinking about joining the utility of soybeans with the efficacy of fermentation, from olden times Japanese understood that for the purpose of effectiveness for health, “*natto*” as a food ingredient has the most powerful impact, doesn't it (laughs)?

However, *natto* has a unique flavor and taste sensation, and it is a fact that there are many people who are not used to eating it. But thirty-odd years ago Americans did not eat raw fish, and now sushi is considered an ordinary thing, with even *uni* sea urchin being popular (laughs). Just like with cheese, where there are many varieties like blue cheese that have a strongly unique character, you know. If one properly seeks out the healthy aspects of *natto*, I think that coming to enjoy *natto* is not all that far in the future.

**JRN:** What is the reason for insisting on organic soybeans?

**S:** The reason is simple. Since the food ingredients are good for health, when

examining that scientifically, one reaches the conclusion that, “With organic raw materials, there is no worry of genetic modification.” Furthermore, conditions

are different from Japan in that there is a comparatively rich supply of organic soybeans. So from the standpoint of obtaining raw organic materials, there is that reason as well, you know.

**JRN:** In regards to your company's new product, “Megumi NATTOTM,” what is the best way to have it served so that one can enjoy it at its most deliciousness?

(前号に続き) 発売と同時に話題になっている、初の米国産オーガニック大豆を使用した現地生産の納豆「Megumi NATTOTM」の製造元、Japan Traditional Foods (www.meguminatto.com) の社長、佐藤南氏に、アメリカでの日本伝統フードビジネス戦略を聞いた。

#### 「ターゲットは健康志向のアメリカ人です」

**Japanese Restaurant News (以下、JRN):** 私は子供の頃から納豆を食べていましたし、今でも納豆の大ファンですが、アメリカ人は文化の違いから比較的苦手な人が多いと思いますが、あえて日本人ではなくてアメリカ人をターゲットにした理由を教えてくださいませんか？

**佐藤氏 (以下、佐):** 日本人にも納豆を嫌いな人がいます。ということは、アメリカにも納豆が好きな人が居るかもしれない。そして納豆がこれから海外に伸びるのにも、アメリカ人からの支持は必要不可欠です。アメリカ人の味覚と食に対する認識は、とりわけ都会で大きな変化を遂げています。ローカルの食材を重んじ、健康志向の人達の食への取り組みは日本以上かも知れません。

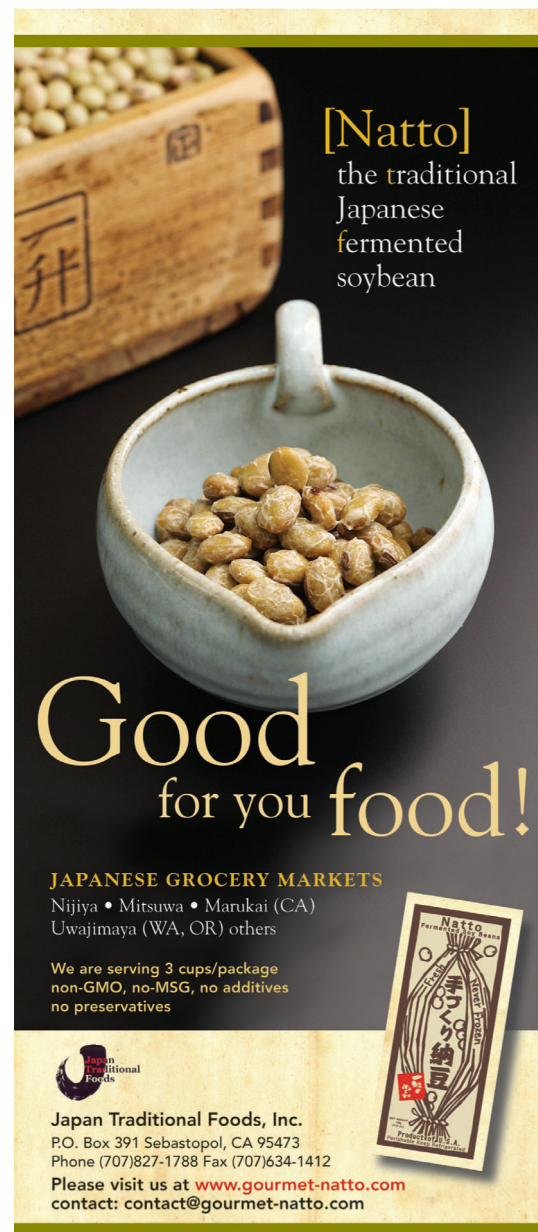
アメリカ社会において大豆に対する評価が高いということは前回お話ししましたが、一方発酵食品に対する認識も増してきています。発酵させるということはその食品の保存性を高め、元の食品よりも栄養価が上がる。そして醤油・味噌・みりん・鰹節などでお分かりでしょうが、「旨味」(Umami)も増します。

大豆の効用と発酵の効果を合わせて考えた場合、日本人が古くから栄養価と健康効果があるという理由で食している食材「納豆」が、一番インパクトがあり衝撃的(笑)かと思いました。

ただ、納豆の味と風味にはクセがあり、食べ慣れないという人が多いのも事実です。しかし30数年前は生魚を食べなかったアメリカの人達も今では鰹は当たり前で、雲丹まで人気です(笑)。チーズにし

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冷凍輸入でないから新鮮な納豆の味わい!



**[Natto]**  
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Japanese  
fermented  
soybean

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ても、ブルーチーズなどクセが強いものが多いですね。納豆の健康的側面を正しく訴求していけば、そう遠くない未来に納豆を楽しんで頂けると思っています。

**JRN:** オーガニック大豆にこだわる理由は何でしょうか？

**佐:** 理由は簡単です。健康に良い食材ですから、そこを追及すれば「素材はオーガニック、遺伝子組換え無いもの」に辿り着きます。さらに日本と違ってオーガニックの大豆が比較的豊富に存在するという点も、材料調達の見点からの理由になりますね。

**JRN:** 御社の新商品「Megumi NATTOTM」は、どのようにして頂いたら、その美味しさを最大に味わえますか？ 特徴を教えてください。

**佐:** Megumi NATTO™ は大粒で大豆の味がしっかりとした美味しい納豆です。ですから、その美味しさを最大限に味わって頂くために専用のタレや辛子で味付けをしてしまうステレオタイプの食し方を提供することを止め、アメリカの食文化に合った様々な食材

Please explain its special features.

**S:** "Megumi NATTO™" has large size soybeans, which make it a *natto* that retains the full deliciousness of their flavor. Therefore, in order to enjoy that deliciousness to the greatest extent, we quite offering it for dining in stereotypical ways with specialized sauces or spicy condiments. In keeping with American food culture, we have thought of methods for eating it in various ways as an ingredient or a seasoning in dishes. For eating them, we have created "Simple Recipe Cards (shown on the bottom in the photograph)" that simply and clearly divide ways of eating *natto* into three combinations, with an essential sauce limited as much as possible, as a foundation for dishes and as a topping.

**Appended Data 1**

For instance, *natto* with olive oil and wine vinegar, and seasoned with a sprinkling of salt, goes outstandingly well with bread.



Appended Data 1

**Appended Data 2**

(Note: On the one hand, the company's website has various recipes posted, but that is for the sake of those who do not eat natto directly. For the nutrients like enzymes and some vitamins, it is not suitable for preparation at high temperatures, so we recommend "simple recipes" that allow one to eat natto enjoying its taste itself directly.)

**JRN:** In conducting the *natto* business in America, what have been some of the difficult points?

**S:** As might be expected, that has been in distribution, you know. Just taking the state of California by itself, it is so big that Japan's main island of Honshu would easily fit inside it, you know, and there is no refrigerated delivery system in place (laughs). Up to now, Japanese *natto* has been imported and all of it has been shipped frozen and maintained in storage. So from that point on, we have struggled to change the distribution and sales system. Actually, we would like to conduct PR activity on the East Coast and in Hawaii, but...

**JRN:** How long is the shelf life of the product?

**S:** By using large size soybeans, a light fermentation process creates a distinctive aroma of the soybeans that only lingers shortly. The difference between the "extra well fermented *natto*" from "small size soybeans" that are imported frozen from Japan is that there is a shelf life of one full month for our product. Of course, after that since it is a fermented food product, it will not spoil, so in the same way as cheese it will age and can be enjoyed like that.

**JRN:** Finally, would you mind telling us the goal of your

business strategy from here on?

**S:** First, we would like to stress the healthy effects of *natto* and bring to the forefront the good flavor and taste sensation of freshly made *natto*, that is, how little bad aromas that it has. By using the internet, through things like demo sales we can conduct slow but steady sales activity. Our first activities are starting in California.

Our goal is to have American society understand once more the true goodness of Japanese cooking, and the "genius of Japanese cuisine" that is hidden within it. And then, we want that wave to reach Japan, where unfortunately the Japanese food lifestyle has ended up deteriorating at present. I think that this is a good opportunity for Japanese to return to those roots.

I think that it would be ideal to break away from large scale production and large scale consumption of products, passing along to posterity the food ingredients of the distant past that supported the Japanese spirit and physical constitution, using traditional food ingredients and traditional methods that many middle and small

**Megumi NATTO™ Preparation & Recipes**  
A POPULAR WAY TO EAT NATTO:

1. Steam or boil brown rice. 2. Open Megumi NATTO™ and peel off the plastic film.  
To cut the natto strings use some for stirring and wind around your utensil quickly. Do not stretch, good natto strings may stretch up to four feet. 3. Put Megumi NATTO™ in slightly bigger and deeper bowl (if needed) and stir beans 15-20 times. 4. Add soy sauce and finely chopped green onion (optional)  
5. Stir again. 6. Serve Megumi NATTO™ over warm brown rice and enjoy!

ENJOY CREATING YOUR OWN FUSION RECIPE  
Select BASE, SAUCE and TOPPING as your choice with 3oz cup of Megumi NATTO™:

BASE	SAUCE	TOPPING
Brown, white or jasmine rice	Soy sauce 1-1.5 tablespoons + Wasabi* or + Mustard*	Yellow or green onion finely chopped
Whole wheat or rice bread	Olive oil 1 teaspoon	Tomato diced
Bagel/Tortilla	Rice, white wine or balsamic vinegar* Salt*	Avocado diced
Crackers	Caesar, Italian or Ranch salad dressing 1.5-2 tablespoons	Apple diced
Lettuces	Mayonnaise*	Cream Cheese*

\* = to your taste

Within natto's sticky texture are all its nutritious benefits from fermentation.  
After preparing, soak bowls and utensils in cold or hot water for 10 minutes then hand wash.  
Discover more recipes & health benefits of Megumi NATTO™ at: [www.meguminatto.com](http://www.meguminatto.com)

Appended Data 2

size producers can understand and that will increase their numbers.

If Americans can somehow understand the goodness of traditional Japanese foods, and that could lead to a boom, then in a reverse manner Japanese young people could also turn things around... I look forward to that kind of boomerang phenomenon occurring.

と調味料とで食して頂く方法を考えました。納豆を食する上で最低限必要なソース、基本、トッピングの3つの組み合わせを簡単明瞭に分かって頂けるよう、『簡単レシピカード (写真左参照)』を作成しました。

**Appended Data 1**

例えば、納豆にオリーブオイルとワインビネガー、少々塩で味付けした納豆はパンにとても良く合います。

**Appended Data 2**

(追記：一方、当社WEBサイトに様々なレシピを載せていますが、納豆を直接召し上がれない方の為であり、納豆に含まれている酵素、ビタミンなどの栄養素の中には高温での調理に不向きなものもあるため、私どもの『簡単レシピ』で納豆自体の味を直接召し上がって頂くことをご推奨いたします。)

**JRN:** アメリカでの納豆ビジネスを行うに当たって、難しい点などありますか？

**佐:** やはり物流ですね。カリフォルニア州ひとつをとっても日本の本州が簡単に入ってしまう大きさですからね、冷蔵の宅配便も無いし(笑)。これまで輸入されている日本の納豆は全て冷凍輸送・保存なので、今までの物流・販売システムを変更していただくのにも苦労します。実際は東海岸やハワイへもPRしたいのですが...

**JRN:** 賞味期限はどのくらいですか？

**佐:** 大粒大豆を使用し、大豆の風味を残した香りの少ない浅め発酵ですので、日本から冷凍輸入される「小粒」で「十二分に発酵させている納豆」とは違い、1か月の賞味期間が十分にあります。それ以降でも発酵食品ですので、腐ることはなく、チーズの様に熟成して食される方もいらっしゃると思います。

**JRN:** 最後にこれからのビジネス戦略とゴールを教えてくださいませんか？

**佐:** まずは納豆の健康効果と新鮮な納豆の味と風味の良さというか、いわゆる臭みの少なさを前面に訴えていきます。インターネットを使ったり、デモ販売などの地道な販売活動をしたり。まずはカリフォルニアから活動していきます。

我々のゴールは、アメリカ社会で今一度日本食の本当の良さとその中に秘められた「日本食の知恵」を理解していただく事です。そしてその波が日本に波及し、残念ながら崩れてしまった現在の日本人の食生活を元に戻すきっかけになればと思っています。

大量生産・大量消費の商品から離れて、日本人の精神と身体を支えてきた昔ながらの食材を後世に伝えていくためにも、伝統的食材を伝統的手法で作っている多くの中小の生産者に対する理解をもっと増やしていけたらと思っています。

アメリカ人がもし日本の伝統食の良さを理解し、それが一つのブームになってくれたら逆に日本の若者も振り向いてくれるかと...。そんなブーメラン現象を期待しています。



**Minami Satoh Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae**

- 1981 Graduated Keio University, Faculty of Law
- 1983 Graduated Thunderbird School of Global Management Entered E.I. DuPont Far East Japan Branch (now DuPont Incorporated)
- 1989 Entered Satoh Steel Pipe Co., Ltd. Kokan Incorporated (Urayasu City); in 1991 assumed position of director
- 2003 Started SKH Co., Ltd. Food Division (Minato ward, Tokyo)
- 2006 Sold the part of Satoh Steel Pipe Co., Ltd. and resigned the president Acquired Yaguchi Natto Production (presently Yaguchi Foods, Saitama City) Set up Japan Traditional Foods, Inc. in the U.S.
- 2008 Came to the US in June; in November began production of "TezukuriNATTO™"